

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMCONSUL BILBAO

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L BORDEAUX 0132

E.O.: 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, FR

SUBJECT: BASQUE PROBLEM IN FRANCE AND THE ETA

1. DURING A RECENT CONVERSATION I HAD WITH THE SOUS-PREFET OF BAYONNE, JEAN BIACABE WHO IS DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR FOLLOWING THE BASQUE PROBLEM IN SOUTHWEST FRANCE, HE MADE THE FOLLOWING MAJOR POINTS:

2. THE GRADUAL LIBERALISATION OF THE SPANISH REGIME HAS INDUCED AN IMPORTANT NUMBER OF SPANISH BASQUE POLITICAL REFUGEES IN SOUTHWEST FRANCE TO RETURN TO SPAIN. THE SPANISH CONSUL GENERAL IN BAYONNE INFORMED BIACABE THAT OVER 300 PASSPORTS AND/OR TRAVEL DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN ISSUED RECENTLY TO SPANISH BASQUES IN FRANCE FOR THEIR RETURN TO SPAIN. THIS DEVELOPMENT HAS LIGHTENED SOMEWHAT THE SURVEILLANCE WORKLOAD OF THE LOCAL FRENCH POLICE AUTHORITIES.

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3. HOWEVER, THE LIBERALISATION MOVES IN SPAIN HAVE CAUSED

A WIDER RUPTURE WITHIN THE ETA BETWEEN THE MORE MODERATE WING AND THE MORE MILITANT POLITICO-MILITARY WING. ACCORDING TO BIACABE, THE MODERATES ARE ADOPTING A WAIT AND SEE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE SPANISH REGIME AND ARE BECOMING CAUTIOUSLY HOPEFUL THAT POLITICAL LIBERALISATION MEASURES IN SPAIN WILL CONTINUE. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE MILITANT WING OF THE TA INTERPRETS THE SPANISH REGIME'S MOVES AS INSIGNIFICANT AND DECEPTIVE WITH THE ACTUAL AIM OF PARALYZING THE OPPOSITION IN SPAIN. CONSEQUENTLY, THE POLITICO-MILITARY WING CAN BE EXPECTED TO MOUNT AN ORCHESTRATED TERRORIST CAMPAIGN IN THE COMING MONTHS IN SPAIN WHILE CONTINUING TO USE FRANCE AS THEIR BASE OF OPERATIONS. BIACABE ESTIMATES THAT THEY CONSTITUTE ONLY A SMALL NUMBER OF ACTIVISTS (60). DESPITE THEIR SMALL NUMBER, BIACABE DOES NOT UNDERESTIMATE THEIR POTENTIAL TO CAUSE SERIOUS INCIDENTS, INCLUDING BOMBINGS, ASSASSINATIONS AND KIDNAPPINGS. HE IS CONVINCED THEY EMBRACE MORE AN ANARCHIST IDEOLOGY THAN BASQUE NATIONALISM.

4. COMMENT. THE FRENCH AUTHORITIES CONTINUE TO FOLLOW THE BASQUE SITUATION CLOSELY IN THE SOUTHWEST OF FRANCE. BIACABE, DESPITE THE FACT HE IS ONLY A SOUS-PREFET, REPORTS DIRECTLY TO MINISTER OF INTERIOR PONIATOWSKI AND HAS A DIRECT LINE TO THE ELYSEE. HE IS CONSTANTLY "ON DUTY" AND MUST ACCOUNT FOR EVERY INCIDENT, MINOR OR MAJOR, CONCERNING THE BASQUE PROBLEM IN FRANCE. HE IS FRUSTRATED BY THE NUMBER OF INCIDENTS WHICH GO UNACCOUNTED FOR. FOR EXAMPLE, AFTER AN EXTENSIVE SEARCH THE FRENCH AUTHORITIES HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO DETERMINE THE SORT OF THE TWO SPANISH POLICE AGENTS WHO REPORTEDLY DISAPPEARED IN THE FRENCH PAYS BASQUE IN APRIL, 1976 (SEE BORDEAUX 34). THE FRENCH AUTHORITIES SUSPECT THAT PERHAPS THE SPANISH INTELLIGENCE SERVICE IS PLAYING GAMES WITH THEM AND THAT THE TWO POLICE AGENTS ACTUALLY RETURNED TO SPAIN. THE PURPOSE OF SUCH A SPANISH OPERATION WOULD BE TO PRESSURE THE FRENCH TO MAINTAIN A CLOSER WATCH ON THE ETA IN FRANCE AND CURTAIL THEIR FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT. HOWEVER, THE FRENCH AUTHORITIES MAY BE TRYING TO COVER THEIR OWN EMBARRASSMENT OVER NOT BEING ABLE TO UNCOVER ANY TRACE OF THESE TWO MEN.

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IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, THE BASQUE FRONTIER IS SO FLUID AND EASY TO CROSS CLANDESTINELY AT MANY POINTS. THAT EFFECTIVE CONTROL OVER ETA AND SPANISH AGENTS (BARBOUZES) IS A VERY DIFFICULT TASK IN THE BEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES.
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